

# Supervisor FRONTLINE

A newsletter from the WA State Employee Assistance Program

## Questions



How can I earn more credibility with my work unit and team? I know many of them are far more knowledgeable than I am, yet I hesitate to let on how much I don't know. It's a Catch-22: I know the least, but I must lead a team of employees who know more.



There were a few employees I did not refer to the EAP in the past because I felt that they were too manipulative and dishonest and that they would easily snow the program. What's the argument for referring these employees?

## Answers



You can still establish credibility as a leader. Ironically, your first step is to admit what you don't know and ask for input. Many managers or supervisors have less knowledge about products, systems, and processes than those they supervise. Even if you were the one with more knowledge, the basics of supervision and leadership would be more important. Employees want you to show dedication to what they are doing. They want you to value their capabilities and help them strengthen their skills; they want to feel your passion about the job. Your employees don't want to sit in unproductive meetings; they want you to create opportunities for them and generally help them be happier on the job. Find out what your employees' unmet needs are and how to make their jobs more meaningful. You may be considered the best leader they've ever had.



The EAP has a programmatic approach to resolving performance problems associated with troubled workers. This perspective is lost when EAPs are thought of only as offices where employees go to get help. From the employer's perspective, the EAP approach always works. "Works" does not mean that an employee is always successfully treated and returned to his or her original state of competence and capacity, although that is the most desirable outcome. Instead, it means that every method has been provided to accommodate the employee toward the organization's goal of resolving the performance or conduct issues. The most important dynamic in this process, and the one that makes EAPs succeed, is when difficult employees accurately perceive organizational resolve and have clarity on what will happen if performance problems continue. When this happens, even the most difficult employees will often pursue wellness in their self-interest, motivated by the need to avoid job loss.

# Frontline Supervisor

## Questions



I have heard about how valuable it can be to allow employees to nap on the job. I know many employees who would happily participate, but can you clarify the value or downside of this practice? I have one employee who could especially benefit from a “nap” time .



I am a “nice guy” supervisor. I’ve been with the company for 32 years. I don’t hassle, chase employees, or watch them from the shadows. I admit to feeling less motivated these days to be proactive with them, but I can’t decide if I’m getting lazy, experiencing depression, or what.



Employees with drug or alcohol problems exhibit patterns of trying to hide their affliction and put their best face forward. Doesn’t this prove that substance abusers are not really in denial? We hear addicted people are in denial, but behavior contradicts that notion.

## Answers



Arguments for allowing employees to nap on the job appear in management and HR literature periodically. Most stories are anecdotal, such as those about Google, Ben and Jerry’s, or the Huffington Post allowing such a practice under controlled circumstances. The focus is usually on how refreshing a nap can be and how it may increase productivity. One questionable argument in support of napping is that it counters the problem of the modern employee who today typically comes to work after getting less sleep. Some authors attempt to draw a distinction between “sleeping” (bad) and “napping” (good), without explaining how one doesn’t become the other. Overall, it appears companies have not bought into the napping practice on a grand scale. If you have an employee with a sleep issue, a referral to the EAP is still the best advice.



Does management have expectations for you to make tougher decisions involving your employees? If you are keeping up with their expectations, then your leadership is meeting their goals. Regardless, meet with the EAP for some consultative guidance on these issues. The EAP can provide an assessment to determine whether you are suffering from depression. You may need to establish work goals and involve your supervisor to help you reengage and get reenergized. In the meantime, be cautious. Employees who perceive supervisors as apathetic or unwilling to hold them to account are naturally incentivized to lower their productivity, increase absenteeism, and generally take advantage of that sort of leadership style. All of this increases risk on many fronts.



Denial is a defense mechanism that doesn’t preclude some awareness of the existence of a problem. In fact, some awareness is necessary in order to use denial as a defense mechanism effectively. Denial defends against the anxiety produced by evidence that a problem exists. That’s its purpose. Denial isn’t meant to fool you. It’s to fool one’s self. The evidence that this is true is found in the stories of recovering people who no longer abuse substances, and yet they have the ability to recall how they lied to themselves about the true nature of their problem during the time when it was most acute. For someone with no alcohol-related problems, denial has an entirely different meaning. Denial for the addicted person is about a refusal to accept reality because it’s too threatening. More accurately, denial is a refusal to consciously acknowledge what a person and others can plainly see is a problem.